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ABSTRACT

Rather than giving basic writing students handbook and workbook exercises to direct their proofreading, teachers can use a monitoring system that teaches the students to recognize problems and to systematically monitor and eliminate the difficulties. After completing two or three assignments that include several drafts, students copy out all the errors in each category of errors that has appeared in their papers, such as subject-verb agreement, fragments, parallelism, or possessive problems. Sentences from each list are then examined for any common, recurring feature that may serve to identify the problem as manifested in the list being studied. For example, a system for monitoring verb sequence problems is called CLC: circle all verbs, label all verbs either present or past tense, and check for consistency of tenses and to see whether the verbs make sense. Problems that yield visual clues to careful analysis can be eliminated from basic writers' texts with a little effort. Identifying problems that provide few or no visual clues to their presence may depend on complex grammatical analysis or on intuitive judgments about grammaticality and the rightness of language. While basic writers may be incapable of subjecting their texts to complex conventional grammatical analysis, they do have intuitions about the rightness of language. When basic writers use these intuitions along with accurate editing check-list charts, they are well equipped to proofread on their own. (HTH)

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The Monitoring Eye: Strategies for Proofreading for Basic Writers

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Proofreading for basic writers in college-level writing courses is often disparaged as a low-level enterprise, often considered relatively insignificant when measured against the more substantial matters of encouraging basic writers to make meaning and to develop fluency, and of creating for them circumstances in which they learn to value their messages by seeing how others value them in the community of writers that is created in the classroom. While I do not disparage the teaching of effective proofreading, I maintain that an emphasis on correctness for basic writers often overlooks their larger potential for becoming effective writers, particularly when they are held hostage to grammar courses and not allowed to write until they are able to perform satisfactorily in courses devoted wholly to the teaching of grammar.

Even at this late date, a surprising number of courses for basic writers restrict students to grammar workbook exercises and to the writing of isolated sentences and unconnected single paragraphs. The basic writers I know, the ones I have been teaching for nearly twenty years, are capable of a great deal more, in part, because I recognize that, by virtue of their status as native speakers of English or bilinguals with near-native speaker proficiency, their competence towers above their inadequacies. I maintain that the competence exists even though the students are placed in developmental writing courses and despite the evidence in their writing of non-standard dialect and first-language interference, ignorance of manuscript conventions and the presence of disjunctures in their reasoning and expression.

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They all have the potential to become effective writers, writing as college students should. And they can be taught to write effective expository prose if they are placed in well-designed courses--preferably a two-semester sequence--that give them opportunities to write narration in order to become comfortable writers before attacking the difficulties of exposition. The expository modes seem inappropriate starting points for basic writers since effective exposition requires an intricate handling of language, a careful attention to the clarity of statement and an elaboration and extension of ideas that basic writers are initially unprepared to attend to. Teaching the conventions of exposition demands an elaborate pedagogy. Teaching the writing of narration does not. Narratives allow basic writers to function much as competent, experienced writers do, for narratives allow basic writers authority over subject matter and control over language. Students may, for the first time, working in the narrative-descriptive mode, be in charge of their writing, creating situations in which writing instructors can deal with language with unusual profit, since instruction can be directed to increase the effectiveness of already creditable student writing. Students can accumulate genuine, uncharitable, honestly earned success. Success does not mean that grades will be inordinately high. They may, most frequently, be average, but while writing in the narrative-descriptive mode, students can develop realistic measures of their performances as writers.

In such an atmosphere, it is sensible to help students learn to proofread efficiently because, in some regards, careful proofreading is an

extension of the same care that students are beginning to develop for general clarity and sense in their papers. In such an atmosphere, students can be lead to be concerned about even the smallest linguistic matters.

I do not recommend ordinary handbook and workbook exercises for directing proofreading but propose instead a monitoring system that assists students in recognizing the presence of problems and then offers procedures for systematically monitoring and eliminating the difficulties.

The procedures have four broad aims:

1) To help students write their individual lists of grammar problems. It is important that students and teachers recognize that, while problems may be numerous in the papers written early in courses, the problems fall into categories that are specific, recurring, usually limited, individual and even ideosyncratic.

2) To help students think about grammar in fresh ways and to assist them in writing a description of each problem they have. Each explanation should grow out of a careful examination of writing that displays the particular problems and should emphasize the linguistic features that serve as visual clues to help students identify the problems. If explanations sound like quotes from grammar books, the explanation must be rejected.

3) To help students use the visual clues as signals to indicate the possible presence of problems, and to help them use their monitoring skills so that the problems can be eliminated if indeed problems are present.

4) To give students both mechanical and realistic practice in monitoring. Mechanical practice is an activity for the entire class. If sentences that display specific problems are collected and duplicated, students can be taught how to recognize the problems and to eliminate them. Realistic monitoring practice transfers monitoring to actual student writing, principally by encouraging the writing of several drafts and the rewriting of each graded paper. Careful instruction in proofreading may include one-to-one proofreading sessions with instructors and tutors or group work with class members. As skills and confidence increase, students may spend more time working on their own outside the class, but giving over classroom time to proofreading is always sensible.

After about a month of writing, after two or three assignments that include several draftings, I ask students to copy out on separate sheets of paper all the errors in each category of error that has appeared in their papers. There might be a sheet for subject-verb agreement, fragments, faulty parallelism, prepositions, verb sequence or possessive problems. Single sentences collected as lists are sufficient for all problem categories except fragments, faulty reference, repetition and faulty verb sequence. For these problems, at least three sentences for each instance of difficulty are needed: the sentence that contains the problem and the sentences that come before and after it.

Sentences in each list are examined to see whether we can discover any common, recurring feature from sentence to sentence that may serve to identify the problem as manifested in the list being studied.

We try to discover visual clues so that students will see what they have been almost blind to but what teachers, on the other hand, often see rather easily.

Students locate the problem and underline it in order to examine the problem itself as well as its immediate linguistic environment--that is, the language to the left and right of the problem. The examination may necessitate a structural analysis of the sentence itself so that the environment becomes the entire sentence. The visual clues, we discover, are often marks of punctuation, parts of speech, articles, final -s and -es on nouns, function words that begin particular kinds of phrases and clauses or the phrases and clauses themselves. An examination of a series of sentences with possessive problems illustrates how lists are used:

Possessives

1. A persons name is a special symbol.
2. My parents goal for me is to succeed in life.
3. In "The Stereotype," Germaine Greer says beauty is a womans life, and the mind shapes itself to the body of the individual.
4. This is not practical in todays world.

What does the eye see in this list of sentences that have problems with the formation of possessives? Students and teachers alike must attempt to free themselves of conventional textbook treatment of possessives in order to respond to what, in fact, is on the page. What is here in each instance of improperly formed possessives is a noun that end in -s followed by another noun. This is an observation that is not likely to be found in grammar handbooks. It points up visual clues, and as such it may enable the student whose problem it is to identify the problem in a way that other lessons have not.

What should be noticed is that, in this instance, the language itself is properly handled. If one only heard the sentences, there would be no way of identifying the problem. The convention of using apostrophes to represent possession is the only thing that has to be taught. The student has to be shown that nouns can be made singular and possessive or plural and possessive. I try to make the concept of possession visual also. The space between singular and possessive and plural and possessive is deliberate, so that students see the concepts of number and possession as separate matters to control:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>and possessive</u>		
boy	's	=	boy's
lady	's	=	lady's
child	's	=	child's
<u>Plural</u>	<u>and possessive</u>		
boys	'	=	boys'
ladies	'	=	ladies'
children	's	=	children's

The observations along with other related information are placed on an editing check list, a simple four column chart that students use to guide them through the proofreading of their papers:

Editing Check List Chart			
Correction Symbol or Comment	Example of the Error: Full Uncorrected Sentence or Sentences	What the Eye Sees: How the Problem Is Identified	How to Eliminate the Problem

The third column--What the Eye Sees: How the Problem Is Identified--is the most important. The following entry should be made there:

Look for nouns ending in -s followed by another noun. (The student might reduce it to letters: NsN.)

The fourth column--How to Eliminate the Problem--should have the following entry:

Decide whether the first noun should be singular or plural. Then place the apostrophe or the apostrophe and -s, making certain the number has been correctly maintained.

(Students are asked to up-date their lists and to start new ones after each writing assignment has been evaluated and returned. Such additions have the potential of modifying entries in the third and fourth columns of the chart.)

Similarly precise observations can be made about sentences that have comma splices:

1. However, in my family, it was different, my parents did not like the name my aunt was going to give me.
2. I have had funny incidents with my name, most of the time it has been just hard for someone to pronounce my name.
3. It also depends on what month the baby is born, I was born in August which means I should have a name that starts with an m or a v.

What does the eye see here? What does the teacher see easily that the student does not?

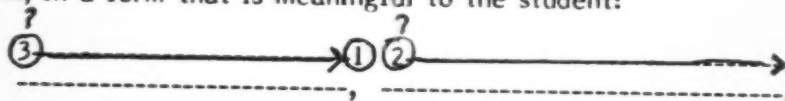
First, the one feature that is common to each sentence is a single comma in the middle of the sentence. The student who has difficulty avoiding comma splices must be suspicious of every sentence

of this sort. In focusing first on the comma, he may have a nearly faultless mechanical device for identifying sentences with comma splices.

Second, the student should read the structure to the right of the comma to determine whether it is a sentence. In doing so, he should note whether the first word is a word that usually begins a simple sentence (i.e., a noun, a subject pronoun, an article, there and the like.)

Third, the student must read the structure to the left of the comma and decide whether it, also, is a sentence. The student should, as in the second step, note whether the structure begins with a word commonly used to start a simple sentence. Further, in both steps two and three, a student can check whether a structure is a sentence by turning it into a yes-no question. Only well-formed sentences can be turned into yes-no questions.

These steps can be represented diagrammatically in the third column, in a form that is meaningful to the student:



① Look for sentences with single commas. ② Read the structure to the right of the comma. Does it begin with a subject word? Is it a sentence? ③ Read the structure to the left. Does it begin with a subject word or a subordinator? Is it a sentence?

The fourth column should have the following:

If the structures to the right and left of the comma are sentences, replace the comma with a period.

Perhaps the most powerful use of this visual cueing is seen in monitoring the information of verb phrases, sometimes a crippling and highly stigmatizing problem for basic writers. Students who write verb phrases of the following sort often do so regularly but can be helped to monitor the problems easily:

Forms of HAVE + past participle

- His generation has fail to provide...information about life. Nor have they provide them with the ability to analyze where they have been.

Forms of BE + past participle

- I believe that a woman can become self-sufficient, have a career and be involve in other things.

MODALS + base form of the verb

- She explained to me what could happened to my sister and me.

Students, for instance, who have difficulty placing -ed's on regular past participles in the perfect tenses that use forms of have or in passive verb constructions that use forms of be will be able to monitor the problem with absolute certainty if they focus on the auxillary verb in the verb phrase and treats it as the visual clue that indicates the need for a following past participle. While irregular past participles cause problems, it is frequently regular past participles with their required -ed endings--so often deleted in the speech and writing of certain speech groups--that need the most monitoring. Modals and forms of do can also be used to cue following forms. Modals and forms of do signal base forms of verbs, not past participles.

A brief look at forms of have, be and at modals and forms of do will indicate how they all can be used to help monitor the proper structuring of verb phrases:

Forms of HAVE + *past participle

have
has
had
having

Forms of BE + *past participle

am
are
is
was
were
be
been
being

*Regular forms are often more troublesome than irregular forms.

MODALS + base form of the verb

can	do
could	run
will	see
would	like
shall	do
should	pretend
may	forget
might	think
ought to	complete
must	do

Forms of **DO + base form of the verb

do	do
does	run
did	see

**Negative and emphatic forms use base forms of the verb:

(A) They do not need money.

(B) You are wrong. They do need it.

As useful as such information is, focusing on single verbs frequently does not enable basic writers to eliminate problems. In fact, unless improperly formed verb phrases are seen in relationship to other verbs, as part of a sequence of verbs, it may be impossible for students to see the problem as anything other than a complex system to be guessed at.

Look at two versions of a student's account of difficulty she had with schoolmates. How can she be lead to produce version B instead of version A?

A. Mudra wanted to get me in trouble even though I was her best friend because I squealed on her to Usha. I told Usha that Mudra didn't come to school last Wednesday. She went to the recreation center that day.

B. Mudra wanted to get me in trouble even though I was her best friend because I had squealed on her to Usha. I had told Usha that Mudra hadn't come to school last Wednesday. She had gone to the recreation center that day.

I have developed a system for monitoring such verb sequence problems that I call CLC: C means circle all verbs; L, label all verbs either present or past; and C, check for consistency of tenses and to see whether the verbs make sense. To determine whether the verbs make a sensible message, assign either clock time or calendar time to each verb. The system itself is manageable, but its usefulness rests on the students' grasp of basic information about verbs and tense.

Basic Information Needed to Use CLC

1. It is useful to provide students with a simple guide to the tenses of common verbs. Particularly troublesome are the forms of do and have, and the modals shall, should, will, would, can, could, and may, might:

	am	do	have					ought	live	(verbs without -s)
Present	is	does	has	shall	will	can	may	must	lives	(verbs with -s)
Past	was	did	had	should	would	could	might		lived	(verbs with -ed)
	were								saw	(irregular forms)
									went	

2. Students should note that infinitives and any -ing forms are not considered finite verbs. Therefore, they are not circled unless they are part of a verb phrase. Alone they are not verbs.

Infinitives: to + BASE FORM -ING FORMS

to	go	going
to	see	seeing
to	run	running

Want to run is a verb and should be circled as should be love running. To run and running are not verbs.

3. When circling verbs, the entire phrase should be circled even though only the first item in the phrase indicates tense time:

Present	(want to run)
Past	(wanted to run)
Present	(has been accusing)
Past	(had been accusing)
Present	(will be accused)
Past	(would be accused)

4. Students often have difficulty deciding whether words are verbs or not. A simple slot frame may be used as a quick checking device to decide this question.

I
You
He/she/it always _____
We
They

I
You
He/she/it _____ yesterday.
We
They

Is while a verb? What about never and since and always?

5. There are two tenses that can be used to indicate the past: the simple past and the past perfect.

Simple past tense verbs indicate that activities took place at a specific time in the past or after that time. The following sequence of statements with assigned clock times illustrates this point:

8:00 8:00 8:01 8:01
When I (got) to the door, I (sighed). I (put) in the key and (opened)
8:02 8:03
the door. I (walked) into the kitchen, (picked) up yesterday's mail and
8:04
(sat down.)

All the activities, marked by the simple past take place at eight o'clock or after.

The past perfect tense, on the other hand, constructed with had followed by a past participle, is used to indicate that something

happened before something else in the past. The following sentence that incorporates time in the statement makes that point clearly:

I arrived at the party at eight o'clock, but it had started at seven.

It should be noted that the past perfect verb, had started, is attached to seven o'clock, a time earlier than the arrival time indicated by arrived, a verb in the simple past.

Armed with this information, a student may use the CLC system to monitor the verbs in passage A above.

Past Fri. 1/17/86 Past always
 Mudra wanted to get me in trouble even though I was her best
 Past Thurs 1/16/86 Past Thurs. 1/16/86
 friend because I squealed on her to Usha. I told Usha that Mudra
 Past Wed. 1/15/86 Past Wed. 1/15/86
didn't come to school last Wednesday. She went to the recreation center that day.

All of the verbs are in the past. Checking the verb for sense indicates that some activities took place before Friday 1/17/86 and therefore need to use the past perfect so that the B version is produced:

Mudra wanted to get me in trouble even though
 I was her best friend because I had squealed on her
 to Usha. I had told her that Mudra hadn't come to
 school last Wednesday. She had gone to the recreation
 center that day.

The CLC system should only be used if a student has trouble with verb sequence. The cues for using the system may be one or more of the following. Only an examination of an individual student's use of language will reveal which of the following conditions are relevant to his or her handling of verb sequence:

- Use CLC if all verbs are in the simple past. Having all the verbs in the simple past may be correct, but since often the past perfect is needed, a stretch of prose that uses only the simple past should be viewed suspiciously.

- Use CLC if there is a mix of past tense and past perfect verbs in a stretch of prose. The mix may be wholly appropriate, but since students often have difficulty managing the mix, verb sequence should be monitored.

- Use CLC if there are present tense verbs in a stretch of prose that uses the past tense predominantly. Since present tense verbs are generally inappropriate among past tense verbs, the sequence should be checked.

- Use CLC if when, before, after, until, once, now that if and as soon as are used. The subordinators naturally generate the use of the past perfect.

- Use CLC if there are indicators that a stretch of prose contains reported speech. Reported speech is signaled by words such as told...that, said that, reported that and asked whether/if

Problems that yield visual clues to careful analysis can be eliminated from the texts that basic writers produce if students and teachers work at it. Problems, however, that provide few or no visual clues to their presence are of a different order. Identifying them may depend on complex grammatical analysis or largely on intuitive judgments about grammaticality, about the rightness of language. While basic writers, working on their own, may be incapable of subjecting their

texts to complex conventional grammatical analyses, they do have intuitions about the rightness of language. All native speakers of English and competent bilinguals--even basic writers--have powerful intuitions about what is and what is not linguistically acceptable. Such intuitions are the natural inheritance of those who speak the language. I tell students that they should read all their writing aloud and that, if they sense that something is wrong with a sentence, it is likely that something is. They should trust those feelings, even if they cannot analyze the problem. They should change the sentence, and when it is written in an acceptable form they will know it. Teachers of basic writers need to encourage the strengthening of these intuitive powers and call them into use at every opportunity so that their students begin to recognize the authority they naturally have over language. When basic writers use these intuitions along with accurate editing-check-list-charts, they are powerfully equipped to proofread. I tell students that they are experts, and very soon they begin to act as though they are.